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Mysticism in the Syriac Tradition

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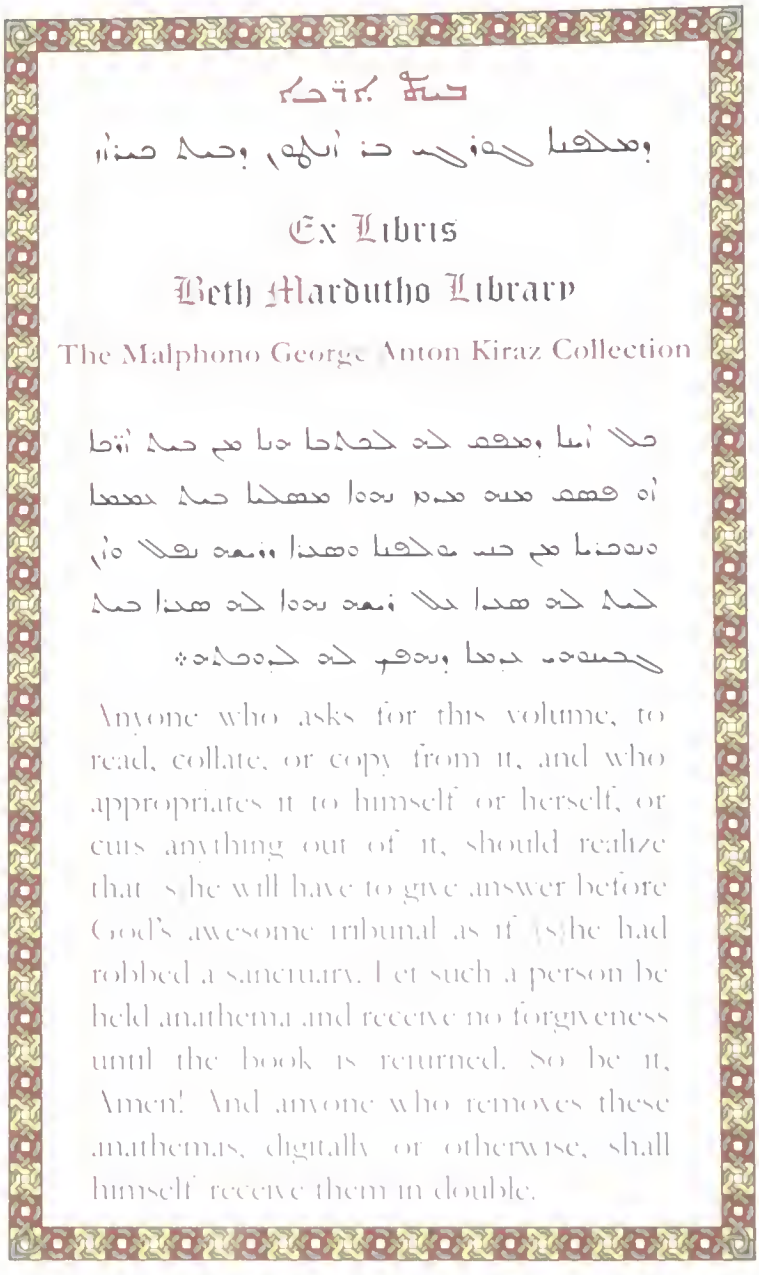

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INTRODUCTION

THE ORIGIN OF CHRISTIAN ASCETICISM AND MYSTICISM IN SYRIA

The original motif of Christian asceticism is the fellowship and imitation of Christ in his virginity, his poverty and his self-abasement. The denial of the world as expounded in the synoptic gospels and the Johannine writings and the union of the faithful with Christ and his Father are the prototype of this spirituality. Ignatios of Antioch exemplifies this feature in an impressive manner. On his way to his martyrdom he writes to the Romans: "How glorious to be a setting sun—away from the world, on to God. May I rise in his presence".

It may be supposed, that from the very first beginning asceticism in Syriac Christianity was deeply connected with mysticism. The first pseudo-Clementine letter addressed to virgins begins with an instruction on the nature and meaning of virginity. Continence is something divine, it is a supernatural life, the life of the angels. The celibate and the virgin have put on Christ. They are imitators of Jesus and his Apostles. In the Gospel of Thomas we find strong elements of a radical renunciation of the world, the search for a mystical light and rest (log. 50, 51) and the longing for the original oneness (log. 16, 22, 23, 61, 106 and 4, 1). The single one/monachos, in Syriac ihidaja, has the promise of election and final union in the bridal chamber (log. 49,75). Also the Odes of Salomo breathe throughout the spirit of an exalted mysticism, which seems to be influenced by the Gospel of John. The union with Christ is a central topic of the hymns and can be expressed by the metaphor of spiritual marriage

(Ode 3). – Besides some strands of asceticism(28, 126)this motif also appears in the Acts of Thomas, especially in the form of a wedding hymn (6-7) —The most outstanding figure of Syrian asceticism in the 2nd century is Tatian. Inspired by his total rejection of Greek culture he founded after his return from Rome to the Orient a community of encratites, who abstained from matrimony, the use of meat in any form and even the drinking of wine in the Eucharist. His Harmony of the Gospels, The Diatessaron(Euangelion damechallete)is full of encratitic versions. For a long time it was officially used in the liturgy of the Syriac church and not before the 15th century it was displaced by the four canonical gospels.

SECTION I

IHE MAIN FEATURES OF PRIMITIVE SYRIAN ASCETICISM

Later in the third century ascetics left the Christian congregations in the towns and villages of Syria, Mesopotamia and Persia to live in the wilderness of the deserts and the loneliness of mountains. This kind of monasticism was completely autochthonous. It neither depends on Manichaeism nor on any Christian model and predecessor. There are three features, which make up its specific Syrian character and its difference to the Egyptian way of asceticism.

. MORTIFICATION AND ITS SPIRITUAL GOAL

The early Syrian asceticism is distinguished by extreme forms of mortification. The moderation practised in Egypt was unknown among Syrian monks, who equated the longing for spiritual life with the contempt of the world. In the Historia religiosa of Theodoret of Cyros they appear as figures with wild visages who lost the flesh from their bones by fasting and whose bodies were dreadfully disfigured by various kinds of chastisement. They lived in absolute poverty and privation and learned to ignore the needs of the body until the verge of self-destruction and the disdain of life itself. In the history of Jacob of Nisibis the mystical motif of this asceticism is indicated: "By maltreatment and mortification of the body he offered to his soul spiritual food". A presupposition of this rigorous practice is primitiveness as hostility toward civilisation. Withdrawing from the world Jacob of Nisibis lived like an animal. He rejected any constructed dwelling and refused to use fire and a woolen garment-

2. ANCHORITISM AND ITS ASPECTS OF ANGELIC LIFE AND IMITATION OF CHRIST THE IHIDAJA

The physiognomy of Syrian monasticism is also characterised by anchoritism. Whereas in the west ascetic individualism was

more and more repressed and the ideal of coenbitism finally became predominant, in the Syrian tradition the perfection of monasticism was always the solitary life. The fellowship of a community was only a preparatory stage for becoming an anchorite. In consequence regular work was despised. While in Egypt the Martha-type of life was preferred, the Syrians revered in Mary the paradigma of solitary meditation. The abdication of the world as complete loneliness and tranquillity excluded the occupation by work.

The mystical dimension of such solitude can be expressed as angelic life. As in Egypt in Syria, too, only the anchorite could be a warrior of God fighting the demons and the devil. But the aloofness from the world and any community also transformed his earthly existence in a spiritual sphere, that his life became angel-like There was a widespread conviction, that the solitary monks had a special relation to angels. They guide the anchorites, inspire them and furnish them with mystical knowledge. Whereas the desert-fathers in Egypt rejected this idea, it was propagated by Afrahat and Ephrem.

Another typical aspect of solitary life is indicated by the designation of an ascetic as ihidaja. The term itself is ambiguous. In some sources it means a celibate, a person living singly without wife. Such an ihidaja must not be necessarily a hermit. He can belong to the "Sons of Covenant"/benai qejama within a congregation. On the other hand this title of Christ corresponding the Greek monogenes was appropriated by solitary ascetics of the early time and applied to themselves, primarily not in the meaning of identification but rather in the sense of fellowship and imitation of Christ on his way of virginity and loneliness. But of course the meaning of union was not excluded. This leads inevitably to the corollary that mysticism as generated by Syrian monasticism had its cradle already in the earliest stage of developement.

3. MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE AS ENTELECHY OF ENCRATISM

The angelic life and the designation of the hermit as ihidaja are only two outstanding aspects of the mystic dimension of Syrian anchoritism, which includes mystical experiences. Some

Apophthegmata of the Desert-Fathers show clearly, that visionary and ecstatic phenomena are utterly foreign to Egyptian monks. They did not expect such pneumatic experiences as the result of their self-discipline and had no appreciation of visions and revelations. Mystical experiences generally evoked suspicion and resistance and were regarded as a work of demons. When Evagrios took his residence in the Nitrian desert and the Kelli, he inspired his contemporaries and friends by his mystological doctrine, but among his fellow monks he remained a stranger. His mystology seemed dangerous and was rejected. Contrary to this attitude Syrian monks had an inclination to mystical experiences. They were outstanding not only by their mortification but also by revelations and visions. For the Syrians the ascetic life leads to the supernatural world and the intercourse with the angels and God himself. Theodoret of Cyros accounts of Julian of Saba: "Being wounded by divine love he was drunken by the ardour of fervent longing. He did no more see the earthly things but dreamt the night of the beloved one and thought of him the whole day". In the biographies of such solitaries a kind of meditation is indicated, an exercise of concentration of the mind. By the training of an apathy towards the outward world thoughts must be limited and even eliminated with the goal of gaining a disposition for introspection. Then the veil was taken away from the eye of the anchorite and he could see the divine glory. In the vita of an old Syrian hermit it is reported: "He saw the glorious and unspeakable light of the Holy Trinity and rejoices in it with a joy which has no end". The ascetic endeavours furthered the soul of Jacob of Nisibis, "that the purified eye of his mind became a clear mirror of the divine spirit and seeing with an unveiled countenance the glory of the Lord he was transformed by God's spirit from glory to glory into the same image".

SECTION II

REPRESENTATIVES OF THE OLD SYRIAN SPIRITUALITY IN THE 4TH CENTURY

The early Syrian asceticism had a tendency to mysticism. This feature can be also found in the spirituality of such outstanding figures of Syrian Christianity of the fourth century as Afrahat and St. Ephrem.

1. AFRAHAT: THE INDWELLING OF CHRIST AND THE SPIRIT

Afrahat represents the old Syrian concept of the church as community of ascetics. The church is the covenant/qejama of those, who promised virginity and holiness. Originally celibacy was the requirement for the admission for baptism. The ihidaja is not generally an anchorite but a son of the covenant, who has renounced marriage to join the fellowship of Jesus. The deep relation to Christ is expressed in the statement: "The ihidaja from the bosom of the father will rejoice all ihidaje". Probably Afrahat does not mean here an ontological unity but rather an imitation of singleness, a conformity of love and a resemblance of poverty...The exclusiveness of this mystical relation is demonstrated by a peculiar exegesis of Genesis 2, 24: "As long as a man has not taken a wife, he loves and honours God his father and the Holy Ghost his mother and he knows no other love. But when he has taken a wife, he forsakes father and mother... and his mind is absorbed by the world and his mind, his heart and his thoughts are drawn from God to the world and he loves it like a man the wife of his youth and this love is greater than that to his father and mother". —A prototype of an ihidaja is Mose. The interdependance between encratism and the experience of the divine presence is exemplified by the story of revelation on Mount Sinai. "When God spoke to Israel, having lived abstinent for three days, how more excellent and pleasant are those who sanctify themselves and are vigilant and prepared

nd stand before God their whole life. Shall God not love them e more and shall not his Ghost dwell in them?" In comparison ith this concern the angelic life ranges as a by-way of tradition expressed in the sentence: "Who will attain the prototype the angels must become strange to all men". The mysticism Afrahat centres in the experience of the indwelling of the pirit. In time of disturbance and sorrow the Ghost of God omes only by prayer and vigilance. "The Holy Ghost dwells those, who raise their eyes to the height and glory of the Lord nd always rejoice in it ..They have received her and she is loved y them and they do not grieve her. They adore their temple or their great King and he enters it and dwells with the peace- ul and humbles". By the presence of the Holy Ghost the faith- ul becomes the house and temple of Christ. Praying in purity nd silence leads to the experience of Christ dwelling in the in- ardness and secret of the heart. The Father himself is present o the believer by Christ,who living in unity with him. The aim of he economy of salvation is seen in this kind of unity: "He came nd took from us a mortgage and returned to his place and said nto us: You are in me and I am in you" (Joh 14,20). There s a summary of Afrahat's mystology in form of a hymn: "Our mouth satisfies you and you are dwelling in us. You dwells in the iegtheus ones and the place is large enough. Your greatness nters into the small heart. You made us temples and habitations f your glory".

2. ST. EPHREM: THE IMITATION OF CHRIST'S SUFFERING AND CRUCIFIXION—THE TENDENCY OF ECCLESIOLOGICAL SPIRITUALISATION

Just as Afrahat Ephrem did not belong to the old Syrian monastic movement. After his baptism he joined the Sons of the Covenant in his congregation at Nisibis. The 51 hymns only handed down in an Armenian translation reflect the same situa- ion as the demonstration of Afrahat. The nucleus of the church s or should be a community of ascetics, who promised virginity and practised within the congregation fasting and vigils as form of proleptic paradise-life.—After the expulsion from Nisibis the advisor and deacon of the bishop of Edessa became an admirer of the rigorous asceticism as it was represented by Abraham Qidunaja and Julianos Saba. Although the hymns about these

Edessenian hermits as well as the letter to the mountaineers and some memre about anchorites are spurious, the attribution of these documents to Ephrem indicate that he was deeply impressed by this ideal of asceticism. Ephrem did not withdraw himself into the solitude, but the hermits in the mountains round Edessa formed for him as preacher a model of radical denial of the world and the realisation of Christian poverty. In this respect even in spurious writings Ephrem's own conviction could be expressed. In these documents the loneliness of the mountains and deserts is the place for the encounter with God. Only by the abandonment of the world and the exercise of penitence the monk will learn God's judgement. In complete solitude the soundness of his soul will be restored and his heart renewed by God's mercy. If this premise is realised, he is able to experience the inhabitation of Christ and the company of the angels.—Another presupposition of this experience is mortification as subjugation of all needs of the body."Hunger, that eats up your flesh, offers you the bliss of Eden; thirst, that drinks your veins supplies you the source of life; fasting that dries up your person, illuminates the countenance and pacifies you". The ultimate purpose of all asceticism is a mystical death. "Everyone who bends his neck (for monastic life) and serves in this institution is regarded as dead". The way to this goal is suffering. It permeates the whole life of the monk as the core of his connection with Christ. "If you are truly his, put on his suffering." The practice of suffering 'ulsana' culminates in a mystical crucifixion. Speaking of the fundamentals of monastic life Pseudo-Ephrem can explain them as "to seek for the glory of the cross, to seek for the shame of the cross, to love the riches of the cross and to carry the pain of the cross". The monk has to affix himself to the cross in a way, that the ascetic practice and the observance of monastic commandments take the place of the nails and the thorns. Through vigils, hunger, thirst and other forms of mortification the body is submitted to crucifixion. In his commentary to the Diatessaron Ephrem shows, how deeply the motif of suffering and crucifixion penetrates his mind:

> 'Jesus died to the world in order that no one should live to the world, and He existed in a crucified body in order that no one should walk sensually by it. He died to our world in His body in order that He may make (us) alive

by His body to His world. And he mortified the life of the body in order that we may not live carnally by flesh. He is made the Master, a teacher not in tribulations of others but by his own suffering. And He Himself first tasted bitterness and (thereby) He showed us that no one can become His disciple by name but through suffering'.

This mystical understanding of mortification implies a certain aloofness from the traditional forms of the devotional life of the church, which seems to be quite alien to the historical Ephrem. Inspired by the spiritual experience of the imitation of Christ's suffering and crucifixion monks could regard themselves as living in a sphere of freedom and autonomy. In his memra "about the solitaries and mourners and those who dwell in wilderness and desolated mountains" Pseudo-Ephrem characterises these pneumatics. "They serve as priests for themselves and they offer their sufferings. Always they give to themselves absolution from their tears. Their fastings are their Eucharist and their vigils their libations, their prayers their assistants, their faith is a sanctuary, their minds are their altars, their virginity their perfect sacrifices, their chastity a veil (of the altar) and their humility a censer of incense". And in another memra he says: "Instead of the buildings of the church they become the temples of the Holy Ghost; their minds stand instead of the altars; as sacrifices their prayers are being offered to the Godhead". This spiritualisation of the institution and the sacraments of the church should be a cause of criticism and a remaining danger for the future of mysticism within Syriac Christianity.

SECTION III

MESSALIANISM: ITS CHALLENGE AND THE RESPONSE

The 'Mesalljane', in Greek the Euchites, the prayers, formed a vigorous movement of Syrian Christianity during the fourth century. They practised radically the simple conviction: The only thing that matters is prayer. Neither sacraments nor asceticism is sufficient for spirituality. The demon dwelling in everybody even after his baptism can only be driven out by praying constantly. Then the Holy Ghost appears in a sensible way and delivers from all evil. Such being redeemed from all demonic influence the praying one is able to behold the Holy Trinity with his own eyes. Although this materialistic form of mysticism and the unduly consequence of the fall were rejected by several councils, the high valuation of continuous prayer, the stress on the real psychical and even physical experience of grace and the presence of the Spirit were a challenge to the Syrian church and evoked the response of its mysticism. The two most important witnesses for this response are the book of Degrees and the Spiritual Homilies of Pseudo-Maharios.

1. THE BOOK OF DEGREES: THE VISIBLE AND THE HIDDEN CHURCH

Contrary to the opinion of scholars as Kmosko and Hausherr the Book of Degrees / Ketaba demasqata is not of Massalian origin but rather an attempt to correct the distortions of this heretical movement. The typical criterions of messalianism are completely missing in this document. Indeed, prayer plays an important role, but it is not the only means for perfection. Asceticism, too, is a decisive factor of the way to God. — Also the Messalian conviction of the indwelling demon is unknown to the Book of Degrees. The original sin appears according to the

rthodox doctrine in the form of concupiscence. Finally there is o rejection of ecclesiastical sacraments and institutions. The ook of Degrees however emphasises the traditional intrinsic onnection between two classes of Christians: the righteous and ne perfect ones. This distinction is a consequence of the fundaental principle: "God has made two worlds and two ministries, n order that from that what is visible might appear that what not visible". While the righteous ones cleave to the visible gns and are content with the fulfilment of moral precepts, the erfect ones strive for the attainment of a spiritual life. Only y leaving the world and renouncing manual work, possessions nd lodgings they come to sanctification and the communion of he mysteries. Only the perfects are able to proceed in the spirit rom glory to glory and to contemplate the Lord in their hearts s in a mirror. The visible church, established by Jesus Christ, s called "a blessed mother, which educates all children". Its ltar, its baptism and priesthood are of divine origin and the presupposition of spiritual development. "If we doubt and show contempt for the visible church and the visible priesthood and this absolving baptism, our body becomes not the temple, our heart not the altar and its light and its priesthood do not appear to us at all". There is no doubt: "If a man separates from the visible church and serves on the mountain, he is guilty and goes astray". But above the visible institution is a "hidden church" "a church of heart and exaltation". In it the Paraclete is working and therefore it is "the mother of all the living and perfected ones". As to the initial sacrament it is stated: "We believe and stand firm that the visible baptism of the Spirit and the propitiation and the forgiveness of sins is due to him, that believes in it". But this is only preliminary to the hidden sacrament, which "baptises through fire and spirit" and can only be experienced as illumination by ascetics. – Similarly there is not only the visible Eucharist celebrated in the church, but also a hidden one. Only the perfect ones can partake its communion. "They eat from the hidden altar, a ministry that is ineffable, that is greater than the tongue of human beings (is able to tell)". Likewise the charismatic gifts are not accessible for those, who only keep the commandments and fulfil their ethical and cultic duties. Only "the strangers and aliens to the world receive the Paraclete" and his gifts: Full knowledge of

faith, illumination, perfect freedom, insight into the mysteries and the whole truth of the supernatural world.

This was the response of the Book of Degrees to the challenge of the radical spirituality of Messalianism: In a time of transition it upheld the archaic Syrian tradition about the meaning of Christian life as ascetic exercise and mystical experience. It adapted this concept to the new situation of the fourth century, when the mass of the baptised could no more attain the original goal and had to be content with the visible signs if grace administered by the institutional church.

2. THE MABARIAN HOMILIES: THE EXPERIENCE OF DIVINE LIGHT IN THE HEART

Another proof of the response of Syrian Christianity to the challenge of the Euchites are the Mabarian Homilies. Probably they are of Syrian origin and their real author is Symeon of Mesopotamia. The spirituality of these homilies may be characterised as affective mysticism. A great store is set not only by the traditional asceticism, although in a somewhat mitigated and spiritualised form, Ascetic practice is the preparation for prayer as medium for supernatural experience with a real emotional effect and the clear consciousness of grace and the assurance of the Spirit. In contrast to the concept of Evagrios, which is centerd in the mind/nouss in the Mabarian Homilies the place of the operation of the spirit is the heart. When the sin mingled with the soul is done away with and the state of freedom from the passions is reached, the heart becomes calm and unified. This can only be attained by single-mindedness and complete detachment. But "the greatest of all good exertions and the chief of all good actions is the perseverance in prayer". The action of Christ in this process is seen in analogy to a portrait-painter. "Those who believe and continually gaze at Him, he straightaway portrays after his own image a heavenly man. Out of his own spirit, out of the substance of light itself, the ineffable light, he paints heavenly image and bestows upon it its good and gracious Spouse". The central metaphor for this spiritual experience is fire and light "The soul, which have been perfectly illuminated by the ineffable.beauty of the glory of the light of the

ce of Christ and has perfect participation of the Holy Spirit nd becomes worthy to be a dwelling place and throne of God, ecomes wholly eye and wholly light and wholly face and wholly ory and wholly spirit". This union with the Spirit is understood communion and mixture with his light effecting the resemance with Christ. In Christ all are unified and rest in this nmaterial fire which enlivens the hearts. This fire burns stongerg weaker. If man opens himself for its secret operation, this liht ashes up in the depth of the heart as it radiated about Christ n the Mount Tabor. Even the body participates in this rapture. As the body of the Lord was glorified, when he went up into the ountain and was transfigured into the divine glory and into the finite light, so are all the bodies of the saints glorified and nine like lightenings. The glory that was within Christ, was utspread upon his body and shone; and in like manner in the aints the power of Christ within them shall in that day be poured utwardly upon their bodies". This transfiguration is not preserved to the resurrection at the end of history. There are hints, nat this experience of the new world already happens in this fe. Probably the following passage is a self-witness of the author:

> It comes to pass that being all day engaged he gives himself to prayer for an hour, and the inward man is rapt in prayer into this unfathomable deep of that other world in great sweetness, so that his whole mind is up aloft, rapt away thither, and estranged from things below. For the time being forgetfulness comes upon him with regard to the interests of the earthly mind, because his thoughts are filled and taken captive to divine and heavenly things to things infinite and past comprehension, to wonderful things which no human lips can express, so that for that hour he prays and says, Would God that my soul might pass along with my prayer!'
>
> (VIII, 1)

In this union with Christ can be realised, that the soul and he Lord become "one Spirit, one mixture and one intention". But this mingling does not suspend the fundamental difference etween creator and creature:

Consider here, and discern, and understand how. Listen. He is God; the soul is not God. He is the Lord; it is a servant. He is Creator; it is a creature. He is the Maker; it is the thing made. There is nothing common to His nature and to that of the soul. But by reason of His infinite, unspeakable, inconceivable love and compassion, it pleased Him to dwell in this thing of His making, this intelligent creature, this precious and extraordinary work, as the Scripture says, 'that we should be a kind of first-fruits of His creatures', for His wisdom and fellowship, for His own habitation, for His own precious and pure bride. (XLIX. 4)

SECTION IV

EVAGRIOS PONTIKOS AND HIS INFLUENCE

The affecive mysticism of the heart and the divine light is he particular contribution of Syrian Christianity to an ecumenical pirituality and deeply influenced the Byzantine way of prayer nd contemplation from the middle ages unto the present time. ts peculiar profile can also be estimated in comparison with a ypical hellenistic kind of mysticism represented in the fourth entury By Evagrios Pontikos.

. PRAXIS—THEORIA—THEOLOGIA: THE THREE STAGES ON THE WAY TO GOD

The last 16 years of his life Evagrios spent in the Nitrian esert. Here he plunged deeply into the milieu of Egyptian onasticism. The collected sayings of the desert-fathers give witness of a life of poverty, silence, inward purification and constant prayer. It is this way of asceticism, which is interpreted by Evagrios in terms of the spiritual conception of his great master Origen. Similar to his Alexandrian teacher he divides the spiritual way into three stages. His treatise "Praktikos" commences with the statement: "Christianity is the dogma of Christ our saviour, which consists of the praktike, the physike and the theologike". And one of his 153 sayings "On Prayer" runs: "When you are a theologian, you are really praying; and when you are really praying, you are a theologian". These two aphorisms comprise the whole spiritual system of Evagrios. The intial phase of the way is always the practice: The withdrawal into silence and solitude and the endeavour for apatheia/impassibility, the freedom from all passions. These appear no more as demons but in the form of evil emotions and thoughts, which are classified by Evagrios as the eight vices of gluttony, fornication, avarice, grief, anger, accidie/listlessness, vainglory and pride. The therapy of these psychical diseases leads to freedom and health and its fruits are the virtues, especially that of love, which is the gate for the

second stage. Physike means the contemplation of the natural order and its spiritual principles. Since the whole world is created by the Word of God, this contemplation leads from the material sphere to the immaterial realm of the angels, who continually behold the face of God. On this stage the soul realizes itself as nous/hauna in the company of the pure minds. Then it is able to attain theologia, the sight of the Holy Trinity. This highest form of contemplation happens in "pure prayer" beyond all words and thoughts and any form in an unlimited ignorance. When the nous is purified from all passions and denuded from all outward impressions as well as inner movements, when it is completely bare of all worldly objects, then it may happen, that it regains its original state: The vision of its own essence, the light of the Holy Trinity. This experience is not ecstatic. Contemplating the divine light and such learning theologia, the soul becomes enstatic perceiving the depth of its mind. In the mystological treatise Skemmata/Considerations Evagrios speaks of the Nous beholding himself in a light without form like a saphir in the colours of the sky and clad with the light of the contemplation of Trinity. This experience is knowledge of God in the depth of the soul, merely intuitive, beyond any cognitive comprehension. It is an anticipation of that sight/theoria, which is granted to man in the future life. In his letter to Melanie Evagrios uses for the unification of the human nous with the nature of the Father the simile of a stream flowing into the ocean and mingling with it. This is the only indication by Evagrios of a kind of monism leading beyond the limits of Trinitarian theology.

2. THE CONDEMNATION BY THE II. COUNCIL OF CONSTANTINOPLE AND ITS EFFECT

Evagrios Pontikos exerted an immense influence upon Greek and Oriental spirituality by his subtle understanding of mystical prayer, by his idea of mystical life as supreme passivity of the nous in relation to all noetic objects, by his classification of the three degrees of the spiritual way and its eschatological goal, the contemplation of the light of the Trinity. Especially his treatises "Praktikos" and "On Prayer", in which he transformed Origenistic ideas into a practical concern, had an ecumenical effect in east and west. The controversies in Egypt and Palestine shortly after his death (399) about some heterodox suggestions of

Origen do neither refer to the person nor teaching of Evagrios. Evidently his theoretical opus magnum of the Kephalaia Gnostika was not yet known to Epiphanios, Hieronymus and Theophilos of Alexandria. Not until the sixth century this book stirred up the dogmatic settlement and finally led to the condemnation of Evagrios by the Greek church. Its ideas were fostered by the so-called Iso-Christians, who at first lived near the eremitical abode of Mar Saba in the Kidron valley near Jerusalem. Then they founded in Thekoa near Bethlehem the new Lavra. The 10 anathematisms published in the year 543 by the emperor Justinian in his letter to Menas are directed against Origen and his systematic wrok Peri Archon. On the contrary the 15 anathemas of the II Council of Constantinople (553) refer to the Origenism as represented by Evagrios. With this condemnation the spread of his works in the East-Roman empire was prevented. Only pseudonyms could save them from complete extinction. But beyond the borders of Byzantium his influence the more continued and his authority was uncontested. The monks being expelled from the New Lavra propagated his ideas in Mesopotamia and Persia. But before we trace this further spread of mysticism in Syriac speaking Christianity we have to remember a Syrian hermit, who besides Evagrios and Pseudo Macarios became the third great authority for Syrian spirituality.

SECTION V

JOHN THE HERMIT: THE THREE DEGREES OF THE MYSTICAL WAY—THE ANTICIPATION OF THE NEW WORLD—ECCLESIOLOGICAL RELATIVISM

In numerous treatises, letters and conversations written down by his disciples John the Hermit, also called John of Apameia, expounded his mystology. Quite independent from philosophical and theological schools he represents a spirituality of mystical experience and Christian hope. By baptism the door is opened for the coming world. The new life granted by this sacrament moves us "to advance in the cognition of the other world until the time comes to enter it". Already now begins in a mystical way the cognition of the world to come. "As a child leaves the womb of the mother and perceives the earthly light seeing it without any reflection, so man rising with all powers of the soul above the sphere of visibility perceives the hidden light of the new world with a sensation of verity although he cannot comprehend with his brain the future mystery". The access to this mystical cognition consists of three stages. On the corporal stage/mesuhta depagranuta the desires and passions of the body must be conquered. On the psychical stage/mesuhta denapsanuta the soul attains tranquility and freedom from all thoughts. By the exercise of virtues its inner unity is restored. On the pneumatic stage/mesuhta deruhanuta man is unified in such a way, that all objects of sensual or intellectual perception disappear and the light of life arises to him his soul uniting pneumatically with God. —This threefold ascent to unification with God as expounded in the "Dialogue on the Soul" can be described by two other aspects. With pureness/dakjuta John means the ethical foundation of this way, with limpidity/sapjuta the eschatological transparency bestowed to the soul in the pneumatic stage of perfection. "When man beholds in his soul the beauty of the mysteries of God", then begins in a proleptic manner the life of the new world with its joy and freedom.

Notwithstanding the central role of haptism this mystology ontains some critical elements directed against institutional hristianity. The following utterances remind of the old-Syrian ndency for spiritualisation. "The true church does not consist those, who assemble in rooms or meetings. It is rather the ue cognition, in which the believers delight". In a letter he rites: "Instead of assembling in a church we are dignified to e the house-mates of God getting revealed his Spirit. Instead ne light of the lamps we are dignified the light of cognition; in- ead the bread of the body and the chalice of his blood we are ignified of his communion in the eternal kingdom". Such anti- ipation of eschatological fulfilment leads the faithful to perfect reedom: "He is not obliged to observe commandments. Such he esembles God above whom no law or commandment exists ecause his kingdom is without end". This relativism towards cclesiastical order caused Philoxenos of Mabbug and Theodoros ar Koni to charge John the Hermit of heresy. But inspite of his mistrust he deeply influenced the mysticism of Syrian Chris- ianity.

SECTION VI

STEPHAN BAR SUDAILI AND HIS MONISM: THE WAY BEYOND UNIFICATION

Whereas Philoxenos of Mabbug (460-522) probably rejected John of Apameia on mere ecclesiastical grounds without having appreciated the spirituality of the Syrian mystagogue his damnation of Stephanos bar Sudaili concerned the core of mysticism. Credibly it is reported, that visitors of this monk of Edessa could read in his cell the inscription: "All nature is homogenous to the (divine) essence"/kul kejan bar kejana dituta. In the "Book of the Holy Hierotheos" he reproduces the fundamental ideas of the Origenistic kosmology. By the fall of the pure minds from the original unity the variety of creation came into being. But at the summit of its hierarchy remained the only non-fallen mind, Christ, who alone preserved the identity of his divine being. But even "the Son is only a mansion near the Father; and they, who are going to the Father must pass beyond the mansion". Impressively Stephen depicts the return of the fallen mind and its ascent to the Father. Strengthened by the mystical Eucharist it penetrates the spheres of heaven and enacts the crucifixion of Christ, at the right hand the soul and at the left the body. "And the divine mind will cry out and say, O God, O God, why hast thou forsaken me? and will bow its head in great humiliation and will endure the mystical death, by which, in Christ it is appointed, that we should die—for no one can beeome Christ, whosoever dies not by his death—and the body also and the soul die with it". After the burial and the night of the mind and its resurrection together with its glorification on the Mount Tabor follows the combat with the demons and the tree of evil, then the second baptism by fire and Spirit, the mystical sacrifice and the ascent to Paradise. The highest peak of perfection is attained, when the mind has transcended all objects of the visible world. Then "it will not see by vision/hezwa nor by form/demuta and it will no longer ascend and descend, and will no more see above and below, for, then the shape of the world passes away and (the mind) is no longer limited but limits all". When the mind has passed beyond all speech and language even the name of Christ is abandoned and also love belongs to the realm of limitation and

tinction and merges into the unity with the loved one. "Therere the mind abandons the designation of sonship, when it bemes without distinction". Finally when the mind is accounted rthy of this contemplation " it will begin by a new and holy ooding to create a new world; and will create a new man in own image without image and in its own likeness without likess; and will mete out the heavens with its span, and will measure e dust of the earth in its measure and will number the deeps of e sea, and will weigh the hills in a balance". Here all bounds e exceeded and all distinctions are transgressed. Let us then t away unification/hadjuta and speak of commingling/hebikuta' ne fulfilment of the mystical way and experience is above unication. "For when the mind is commingled in the Good, that stinction which it formerly possessed is no longer known or en; and further, when there is in it (but) one, no longer are ere counted with it two; for the time is appointed and destined be, when the number two shall be no (more); for it is evident, at whatsoever divided is divided, from one, but if division is moved, of necessity all will become one".

This train of ideas on non-duality, in the language of the anishads advaita, is no mere metaphysical speculation. The Book of the Holy Hierotheos" contains some testimonies of its uthor about mystical experiences expressed in terms of Origesm These experiences have their original seat in the monastic mmunity life, the divine service and the solitude of the hermit ith his devotional exercises and meditations. By participation the Eucharist and the constant adoration of the Cross the ithful becomes conscious of his resemblance with Christ. By ntinuous contemplation his mind is led to unification and finally the commingling with the divine essence.

Although this monism already hinted at by Evagrios was ejected by Philoxenos of Mabbug and Jacob of Sarug, the "Book f the Holy Hierotheos" found some prominent commentators mong monophysitic theologians as Theodoros, the Patriarch of ntioch, in the 9th century and in the 13th century Gregory bar Hebrew. In the Nestorian church probably it was handed down esoteric circles. As an underground stream its monism deeply nfluenced the mystology of Isaak of Ninive and other Nestorian nystics.

SECTION VII

THE SYRIAN ADAPTATION OF EVAGRIOS

1. PHILOXENOS OF MABBUG: HIS TRANSLATION OF THE KEPHALAIA GNOSTIKA

In contrast to his uncompromising attitude towards Stephen bar Sudaili Philoxenos was sympathizing with Evagrios. As he expounded in his programmatic letter to the solitary Patrikos of Edessa he was concerned with the excretion of all contestable heterodox tendencies within spirituality in order to save a purified Origenism for the church. At the end of the 5th century Philoxenos is the first witness of the so-called common version of the Kehpalaia Gnostika; although it cannot be proved that he is its translator, this purified form distinguished by the elimination of all Origenistic speculation was corresponding to his own spirituality. Only later in the 6th century a literal translation was produced by Sergios of Resaina. —The monophysitic interest in Evagrios was not accidental. It continued until the middle ages. Dionysios bar Salibi (+1171) wrote a commentary on the Kephalaia and in the account of his coversion to mysticism Gregory bar Hebrew only mentioned Evagrios among the other unnamed initiated referred to.

2. BABAI THE GREAT: HIS MYSTOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION OF THE KEPHALAIA?

The tendency of interpretation initiated in the common version of the Kephalaia was continued about hundred years later by Babai the Great. Administering the office of the Katholikos of the Nestorian church he relentlessly fought against the director of the school of Nisibis Henana of Adiabene who was reproached with Origenistic opinions as the denial of the resurrection of the body and the eternity of the punishment of hell. Notwithstanding this hostility Babai has contributed by his com-

mentary on the Kephalaia Gnostika, that Evagrios became an acknowledged authority of spiritual life within the Nestorian church.

All cosmological ideas of the Kephalaia related to the secession of the minds from the primordial unity into the different bodies, states and worlds and their return to the original oneness are understood mystologically. The mutations of the minds are conceived as spiritual developments of the souls on their ascent to God. But the core of the Evagrian mysticism is fully adopted. Summing up the goal of the spiritual way, "how we can experience this knowledge beyond all material impressions, how we may attain to that unlimited infinity and how we come in an undivided being and one Spirit to that unification", he writes: "Only those gain this mystical sight and this ineffable union, who crucified completely the world and sacrified their own nature. They attain to it in the hour of prayer, when that inexpressible light shines upon them". The sentence of Evagrios. "When that which is one in number is done away with" he coments by a circumscription of the act of union. "That means, when the division soul-body is abolished, which now connected in one being fighting one another in restless desire, have found their peace in an inseparable connection and the soul has ascended and unified with its companions, then there is only one desire, one undivided sight, one impulse directed at the eternal good without division or separation. Then man has become the perfrct image of his creator. That is the meaning of the sentence. Then even the number is abolished, because at that time the corporeity of the minds is swallowed up and man in one Spirit is united with that miraculous light according to his words: When that all is abolished that within us—namely the recognising nature—is one with it in that we are, namely our body. This means the Lord in his prayer—here in the mirror and only for the purified souls, there from face to face—with the words: That they all may be one (Joh 17, 21)".

3. THE IMPORTANCE OF BABAI'S MYSTICISM FOR THE HISTORY OF NESTORIAN SPIRITUALITY AND ITS BREACH WITH ENCRATISM

By Babais's mystology a door was opened, which seemed to be closed by the Synod of Bet Lapat convoked in the year 484

by Barsauma, the metropolitan of Nisibis. This synod not only rejected the christological dogma of Chalcedon. Induced by the pressure of Mazdaism, the state-religion of the Persian empire, it also released all Sons of the Covenant from their obligation of celibacy. With this decision the traditional conviction and praxis was abandoned, that the imitation of Christ could be only realized by a complete denial of the world. Now mysticism was no more intrinsically connected with asceticism. But inspite of this decree, repeated by some other synods and in opposition to the attitude of the official church, Nestorian monasticism flourished in the 6th century under the leadership of Abraham of Kaskar (+588). The work of Babai is a proof, that asceticism remained the basis for Nestorian spirituality. Notwithstanding all official statements the development of mysticism continued and the old heritage found a new expression in mystics like Sahdona, Isaya of Tahal, Dadiso Qatraja, Grigorios of Cyprus and Semaon de Taybuteh.

SECTION VIII

SAAC OF NINIVE AS A FOCUS OF SYRIAN MYSTICISM: UNIFICATION BY THE ENSTASIS OF PURE MIND IN NON-PRAYER

Besides Babai Ishaq of Ninive is the outstanding Nestorian mystagogue of the 7th century. In his treatises appear in a varied form some motives of the "Book of the Holy Hierotheos", for example the regression of the mind into its prenatal existence. The teacher, asked by his disciple for the way to the divine ground, answers:

> First he will free this whole [world] from its state so that it is reduced to nothing, analogous to the first state of the body. Then he will elevate himself intellectually beyond the beginnings of the creation of the world, when there was no creation nor anything, no heaven, no earth, no angels, nor any of the created things. Then of a sudden he will bring all things into existence, his will being sufficient to effect that all is before him in a state of perfection. Then he will descend in his mind and visit all God's creatures. And in his high and wondrous works the wisdom of his creating power will show itself. His power subdues all minds, the amazing and powerful strength of his creating force brings into existence out of nothing a creation with innumerable different kinds.

Also the old Syrian idea of suffering and crucifixion of the mind is taken up in a new manner:

> The cross is the gate of mysteries; here takes place the entrance of the mind unto the knowledge of the heavenly mysteries. The knowledge of the cross is hidden within the sufferings of the cross. And in accordance with communion with them is the apperception of the cross, ac-

cording to the word of the Apostle. The greater place the suffering of Christ takes in us, the greater becomes our consolation in Christ. Consolation means contemplation, which is psychic sight. Sight gives birth to consolation. It is not possible that our soul produce spiritual fruits, except when our heart is dead to the world. For the Father quickens the soul that has died the death of Christ, in contemplation of all the worlds.

The commingling of the mind with the divine essence happens during pure prayer. Referring to Evagrios and John the Hermit Isaak expounds in his 22nd treatise the practice of non-prayer, which belongs to the pneumatic stage. "As long as the spirit is in emotion, it is in the psychic state. But as soon as it has passed this limit, prayer ceases". "As soon as the spirit has crossed the boundary of pure prayer and proceeded onwards, there is neither prayer, nor emotions, nor tears, nor authority, nor freedom, nor beseechings, nor desire, nor longing after any of those thing which are hoped for in this world or in the world to come". The experience of this kind of mystical prayer is expressed with the following words:

Sometimes from prayer a certain contemplation is born which also makes prayer vanish from the lips. And he to whom this contemplation happens becomes as a corpse without soul, in ecstasy. This we call sight during prayer and not an image or form forged by phantasy, as fools say. Also in this contemplation during prayer there are degrees and differences in gifts. But till this point there is still prayer. For thought has not yet passed into the state where there is no prayer, but a state superior to it. For the motions of the tongue and the heart during prayer are keys. What comes after them is the entering into the treasury. Here then all mouths and tongues are silent and the heart, the treasurer of the thoughts, the mind, the governor of the senses, the daring spirit, that swift bird, and all their means and powers and the beseeching persuasions have to stand still there: for the master of the house has come.

In this context Issak speaks of a tehra, a correlate is temha, which takes possession of man. Both expressions indicate an amazement, an astonishment and standstill of all activity, reaching a state of insensibility and even stupefaction. This may not be mistaken for ecstasy in the neoplatonic meaning of the mind going out of the body, in Syriac hatiputa. Isaak rather speaks here of an enstasy, a deep inwardness of the mind transgressing the faculty of its nature and being fulfilled in the coming world. In complete silence, in the destitution of all activity, in the bareness from all objects of this world, in the prefect rest of non-prayer man can experience the eschatological fullness of his life in the sight of God.

No other Syrian mystagogue besides Pseudo-Makarios has exerted such an influence on Byzantine spirituality as Isaak of Ninive. Notwithstanding his Nestorian confession he became one of the great authorities of the Philokalia and is highly esteemed by Greek and Russian monks and laymen until our present time.

SECTION IX

THE CONTROVERSY OF NESTORIAN DOGMA WITH MYSTICISM

In the history of the Syriac church mysticism plays a critical role in relation to the ecclesiastical institution. Sometimes it also incites controversies about the valid dogma. Especially the Nestorian christology must be challenged by some mystic premises, as it happened in the 8th century.

1. JOSEPH THE SEER: HIS SYSTEMATIC SYNTHESIS OF EVAGRIOS AND JOHN THE HERMIT

The influence of Evagrios Pontikos and John the Hermit increased steadily. In numerous treatises Jausep Hazzaja, Joseph the Seer, accounts his mystical experience and his spiritual theology. He attempts to sum up the different aspects and degrees of the mystic way in a systematic structure. Especially in his "Letter about the three stages" and the reconstructed "Chapters about Cognition" he combines the catagories of Evagrios and John the Hermit in order to produce a kind of technical synthesis of the progress of ascetic and mystical life. The corporal stage corresponds to the praxis of asceticism, which leads to the purity of the soul and the contemplation of all bodily beings. The contemplation of the spiritual world, of the last judgement and the providence of God as well as the exercise of inner virtues belong to the psychic stage preparing the soul for limpidity. The pneumatic stage as "place" above limpidity is finally nothing else than the contemplation of the Holy Trinity. Combining the elements of tradition Joseph corrects the christological deficit of Evagrios "For all rational beings, visible and invisible, he states with great emphasis, the humanity of our Lord is a mirror, in which they behold the indwelling Word of God. Apart from this humanity of our Lord there is no contemplation of God,

neither for the angels nor for men, neither in this nor in the coming world". But this contemplation of the humanity of Jesus is only transitory, for Jesus was glorified by his resurrection. "When the soul has entered the place above limpidity, it lives on the mysteries of the new world .... and it will be absorbed by the ineffable glory of the Lord". This glory is identical with the light of Trinity, with which "the contemplation of the mind is commingling" "and which can no more distinguished from the identity of mind/qenuma dehauna". "Then the human heart is filled up with the holy light of the sight of this contemplation in such a measure that the mind does not know and distinguish itself because all faculties of its nature are swallowed up by light. Then there is no thought of anything, nor consciousness, nor remembrance, nor any motions or inner movements, but only astonishment and ineffable amazement".

2. JOHN OF DALJATA: HIS MYSTICAL EXPERIENCE AND ITS CHRISTOLOGICAL INTERPRETATION

A contemporary of Joseph the Seer is Johannan de Daljata. His letters are a store-house of mystographical accounts. No other Christian author before him has described in such a detailed and accurate manner his mystical experiences. Although John of Daljata partly uses the Evagrian terminology, he corrects the concept of the Trinitarian theoria by his Christ-centred perspective. The theoria of mind at all must be forsaken. "Look into yourself and behold God in yourself, unified with you like fire with iron in a furnace or humidity with your body. And beholding him, unified with you, remove your self from your mind, that he alone could be beheld by your mind". This mystical cognition is only possible by and in Christ: "If Christ is the cognition and mind of the Father, the Father beholds himself by his cognition and recognises himself and all things. This let us tell all, who remain in their blindness and suppose erroneously that the human nature of Christ does not behold the nature of that who has adopted it and who has unified himself with it". This denial of the traditional Nestorian christology of division accounts for the experience of mystical union. "Nobody beholds the Father, if he has not in himself the Son, for the Father cannot be seen apart from this cognition, by the indwelling of this cognition (sc. Christ) the Father and the

Spirit are seen. Blessed who is dignified of this". John represents a mysticism of the indwelling Christ. He admonishes his readers: "Nourish the fire of Jesus, that enkindles the purity of your soul .. In the light of this fire you will behold the purity of your soul, in it the beauty of the beloved face is being revealed.... Without him you are not able to see your self nor him in your self. Let the longing be painful for you and let you die for life that you can see in yourself the resurrection....He is in you Remember him .. Unite youself with him in burning love. It is this love, that makes him dwell in the soul together with the Father and the Spirit .. He alone makes appear the contemplation of the Holy Trinity". This union with Christ is most impressively expressed in a beatitude for solitaries. "Blessed you single ones/ihidaje, for you have become with the single one a sole Son of God by the mixture/hultana with him. Therefore the mysteries of the Father are revealed to you and you speak frankly: The mind of Christ is ours. He appeared in our hearts and they are illuminated by the glory of God".

3. THE REJECTION BY KATHOLIKOS TIMOTHY I. AND THE SYNOD OF 786/87

The peculiar form of such mystical experiences and their christological interpretation were the cause for a trial, in which Joseph the Seer and John of Daljata together with John the Hermit were subjected a severe examination of their orthodoxy. The synod convoked by the Katholikos Timothy I. in the year 786/87 reproached Joseph having uttered:

"If you will receive the gift of the Spirit, do not care about prayer and divine service but shun human assemblies and search for a desolate place where not even the voice of a bird can be heard". Or another remark is quoted: "Who has attained perfection does no more require prayer or psalms, lections of holy writ or manual work, because he is perfect. Devoting himself to perpetual prayer he participates in the body and blood of Christ and the works of the Spirit". The synod condemns the opinion, "that the Godhead can be seen by the manhood of Christ or any other creature" and "that anybody could reach perfectiou in this world beyond the humanity of Christ".

The following synods held in the year 790 and 804 repeat these sentences. In retrospection of the controversies of the Nestorian church with mysticism the synod of 804 states: "In the same way as Katholikose Sacriso the works of Hennana of Adiabene and Iso jabh III. the phantasies of Sahdona and the commentaries of Isa ja of Tahal we too anathemize the blasphemies of the Apamean and of Joseph and John of Daljata". By the successor of Timothy I. Iso bar Nun (823-827) the three condemned were acquitted of the charge of heresy. But somewhat later Iso dah, the bishop of Basra reports that these three mystics were still rejected in their church. As Thomas of Marga he does however not conceal his own high esteem of this spirituality.

SECTION X

JOSEPH BUSNAJA'S SUMMARY OF THE NESTORIAN ASCETICISM AND MYSTICISM

From the 10th century an important Witness of mystical life in East-Syrian Christianity is preserved. Johannan bar Kaldun the biographer of his admired spiritual father Rabban Jausep Busnaja gives in the eighth chapter of his Vita a comprehensive exhibition of asceticism and mysticism summing up all traditional elements. Already on this earth the monk realizes the life of the new world. Because all relations to objects of this world are abolished by the eschatological perfection, already now the holy mysteries can be received without sign and form: "By the cognition granted to the nous at the place of humility it arises to the place of spirituality and participates spiritually in a sublime divine mystical manner together with the (celestial) mind in the mystery of the body and blood of our Lord. He recieves really the person of our Lord without symbol, sacrament or simile in the same way the saints receive him in the new world". Similar to John the Hermit Joseph Busnaja deals here with the assimilation to the world to come. Also the three stages of the spiritual ascent are expounded by him. On the corporal stage the fear of God is realized by ascetic exercises. The fight against the demons is followed by the contemplation of all created beings. On the psychic stage man serves God no more as judge but as a merciful guide whom he honours with gratitude and love in perfect silence. Now no more words or works are necessary to approach to God. Christ begins to dwell in the faithful. "The word of our Lord is true. Behold, the kingdom of heaven is inward in you,that means: I am in my Father and my Father is in me and I dwell in an unlimited way in you. Yes Christ is dwelling unlimitedly and verily in the soul." This inhabitation is connected according to the Evagrios with the contemplation of the spiritual beings. Finally on the pneumatic stage follows the last transgression to the unity beyond the subject-object

dualism. "Now we experience that the Nous himself becomes Christ, that it is no more the servant or master of Christ, but that he becomes himself master and that Christ ceases to be the master, that there is no more man, but also no God, but that he becomes God and God being no more God...Therefore on this Stage the life of the monk belongs to the new world, for he already has entered it mistically, he dwells in it in a proleptic way, he participates in its mystery". This entry in the new world happens in complete silence by the enstasy of the mind and the faithful attains to the contemplation of the Holy Trinity. "Then the nous becomes wholly cloud. It forgets itself and absolutely all, until it is drawn back by the angel saying to him: Remember your nature, O man, come back to your nous... Don't sink down in this immeasurable ocean!"

SECTION XI

GREGORY BAR HEBREW: THE SUMMIT & CONCLUSION OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF SYRIAN MYSTICAL SPIRITUALITY

The summit and conclusion of the foregoing development of Syrian mysticism is represented by Grigorios bar Ebraja (1226–1286), the Maphrian of the Jacobites in the mongolic empire of the ilchans. Truly he is called the Thomas of Aquin of oriental Christianity. His encyclopedian spirit enabled him to compose, especially in the "Candelabrum of the Most Holy" with the formal means of Aristotelian philosophy a comprehensive, synthesis of knowledge and faith, a Summa Theologica of Monophysitism.

But in a deep crisis of his life he realized the relativism of all rational theology and ecclesiastical policy. During six years of seclusion he devoted himself to contemplation and the study of the spiritual works of the fathers. The literary fruit of this process of change from a scholastic theologian to a mystic is a commentary on the "Book of the Holy Hierotheos" which evidently influenced his spiritual way in a decisive manner. In his "Ethikon" he summarizes with some formal loans from Abu Hamid al Ghazzali's "Reanimation of the Sciences of Religion/Ihyaculum ad-din the ethical and mystical tradition of oriental Christendom. Some years later, shortly before his death, he treats more precisely than in the foregoing work in the "Book of the Dove" mystical topics for those monks, who are missing a spiritual guide. In the first two chapters he deals with the bodily service in the monastery and the psychic service, which is accomplished in the cell. Then follows a chapter on the spiritual rest of the perfect and at last a tale of the author's progress in teaching and some sentences communicated to him in revelations. Here we find as introduction to a century of spiritual wisdom the witness of Grigorios about his conversion to mysticism. But also in one remarkable passage of the third chapter on the

unification of the mind his own experience may be articulated in terms of mystical tradition. There he writes: "When the mind becomes united with the Good one, it

> ascends from glory to glory by the Lord the Spirit, forgetting not only the things of the world, but also its self, and in the light, with which it is clad in that apartment, it sees itself in the likeness of God. And on account of the full cups it drinks in that room, it looses its senses and in this drunkenness it says: I and my Father are one, and my Father is in me and, I am in him, with other things which the Dove warns to conceal, saying concerning them:- there is a mystery between me and my housemates. When the blessed apostle became acquainted with these mysteries, he said that he had heard unspeakable words which it is not lawful for a man to utter. And his disciple Hierotheos has transmitted to his disciple Dionysios: When the mind becomes united with the Good one, it drops the name of love and affection, for here the lover and the friend become the same person as the Beloved and the Comrade. So it is with all terms denoting dualism, as fathership and sonship, praiser and praised, for at this stage the mind is praising nor being praised.

The unification of the mind has been proved by the same initiated with examples from the material world: As water is collected in a number of vessels and the sunrays in a number of windows and fire in different fuel in which it is enclosed, and the air, in a number of pouches in which it is retained—and when these containing things are taken away their contents again become the one substance of water, sunrays and so on—so the minds, when the bodies are takena way, all of them become one. And as the body has its origin in the elements and returns to them, so the mind, which has its origin in the divine being, returns to it, that God may be all in all, as our teacher and our leader on the way has taught us.

SECTION XII

A RETROSPECTION ON SOME IMPORTANT ASPECTS

At last it may be suitable to deal in a retrospection with some important aspects of the history of Syrian mysticism.

1. THE INTERDEPENDANCE BETWEEN THE VARIOUS FORMS OF SYRIAN, HELLENISTIC AND ISLAMIC MYSTICISM

The mystological tradition summarized by Gregory bar Hebrew must be regarded as the common heritage of Syrian Christianity. It cannot be divided into a seperate monophysitic and dyophysitic strand. In historical respect this Syrian mysticism is originally autochthonous. This does not exclud a later influence by hellenistic elements, especially by the reception of Evagrios. Vice versa it influenced Byzantine spirituality as well as the islamic mysticism of Sufism between the 8th and 10th century. Finally there was an interdependance between both side resulting for example in a literary influence of Al Ghazzali on Bar Hebrew without being a mixture of the two differnt tardi-tions.

2. REASONS FOR THE FAILING INFLUENCE OF DENYS THE AREOPAGITE

As for the interdependance between Greek and Syrian spirituality it seems significant, that the great father of occidental mysticism Pseudo-Denys the Areopagite exerted such a small influence on oriental Christianity although his works were translated into Syriac already in the sixth century. Perhaps the intensive praxis of asceticism and meditation in Syrian monasticism was a barrier against a system of speculation engaged in special problems of neo-plantonic philosophy. Perhaps the transcendental —ideological legitimation of ecclesiastical hierarchy by Denys was repugnant to the spiritual freedom of oriental mystics opposing the institution and authority of the church. But probably the main cause of this striking fact has to do with the strong

tendency of monism distinguishing oriental mysticism from Greek spirituality. The mystical theology of Denys is focussed on the union between man and God. This henosis in the darkness of non-knowledge being identical with the inaccessible light happens above all cognition without mixture by the ecstasy of the soul in an act of excessive love. On the contrary this unification is circumscribed in the oriental traditions as an enstasis of the mind, which leads to its commingling with the light of the Holy Trinity.

Denys the Areopagite as well as Stephan bar Sudali appeal both to the same, probably fictitious, Hierotheos. Indeed this legendary mystagogue has become in this respect the father of two very different ways of mysticism originating from Syria at the beginning of the sixth century. This difference can be shortly characterised on the one side by a remaining dualism of unification, the ecstatic soul not being absorbed in the Godhead, on the other hand by a distinct inclination for the supersession of all duality by the enstatic commixture of the mind with the divine ground.

3. THE POSSIBILITY OF INDIAN STIMULATIONS ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF SYRIAN MYSTICISM

The striking phenomenon of a monistic tendency in the tradition of Syrian spirituality raises the question for possible foreign influences. The rigorous self-and world denying asceticism of primitive Syrian monasticism could at least be stimulated by bhuddistic monks roaming the Persian empire. Especially under the reign of Sapur I. (241-273) there were contacts with eastern religions. Sapur himself was interested in Indian wisdom and collected the literature of various religions in east and west.

Also from Egypt there were connections with India. Buddha is mentioned by Klement of Alexandria. His teacher and the founder of the Catechetical School of Alexandria Pantainos has been in India, where he found Christians, who believed in the apostolic origin of their faith. Therefore Indian elements in the philosophy of Plotin as well as in fundamental theological ideas of Origen cannot be excluded. Also it is possible, that the Graeco-bhuddistic culture of Ghandara destroyed by the Hephtalites in

the fourth century, influenced east-Christian asceticism. At any rate Stephan bar Sudaili drew the consequence of some monistic aspects already intimated by Origen and Evagrios. So it seems probably, that the motive of mixture with the divine ground and the oneness of all reality was transmitted to Syrian mysticism by the mediation of hellenistic theology especially the school of Alexandria and not by direct contacts with Indian religions. This tendency to monism continued and remained vivid from Isaak of Ninive until Gregory bar Hebrew. Not before the eightth century Nestorianism and Buddhism encountered directly. The witness of this contact is the stele of Singanfu with a Syriac and Chinese inscription of the year 781. Only later, in the 10th century the legend of Buddha in the form of an Manichaein and Arabic version was transmitted in the Georgian tongue and translated into Greek by the Athonian monk Euthymios. Later it became known in the west as "Legend of Barlaam and Josaphat".

Whether such influence of Hinduism and Buddhism on the development of Syrian asceticism and mysticism can be proved or not, in any case there are some remarkable affinities and analogies which indicate a deeper convergence of the Syrian tradition with the Indian religions, a good disposition for a vision—to speak with the title of the last book of Bede Griffith—of a marriage between east and west.

Questions

I What are the main features of Primitive Syrian Asceticism?

II Compare and Contrast the difference between Afrahat and Ephrem as representatives of the Syrian spirituality in the fourth century.

III Describe how the Book of degrees responded to the challenges of Messalianism.

IV Show how the Mabarian Homilies met with the erroneous asceticism of Messalianism.

V Describe briefly the influence of Evagrios Pontikos upon Greek and Oriental Spirituality.

VI Write short paragraphs on:

1) the mystology of John of Apameia
2) Stephan Bar Sudaili and His Monism.
3) the attitude of Philoxenos of Mabbug towards the asceticism of Evagrios.
4) Babai's mystological interpretation of the Kephalaia.
5) the importance of Isaac of Ninive in the development of Syrian Mysticism.

VII Briefly describe how Joseph the SEER and John of Daljata challenged Nestorian Christology by their mystic premises.

VIII Write short notes on the place of the following persons in the history of mystical spirituality

1) Gregory Bar Hebrew
2) Denys the Areopagite

IX Discuss briefly the possibility of Indian stimulations on the development of Syrian Mysticism.

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